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ABSTRACT

Foreign language teachers can tap the appeal of video successfully and enjoyably in the foreign language classroom. Potential difficulties include length of feature films and difficulty in understanding the language and story simultaneously. The instructor must select materials and equipment carefully and commit considerable time and energy to preparation of well-organized exercises and activities for incorporation of video into the total classroom experience. Choosing videocassettes involves consideration of video type and subject matter, sizes and formats, languages used and subtitles, length, cost, date of original filming, color vs. black and white, ratings (feature-length), preview, purchase, and rental policies, and available teaching aids. For effective classroom use, teachers should preview videos for possible classroom uses, prepare activities, structure the classroom presentation to accomplish feasible and well-defined goals, introduce grammar and vocabulary, show selected video portions to students, show the entire film with pauses for comprehension checks, and show the film without interruption, followed by additional activities. Tapes containing television commercials are versatile sources of activities, and dubbing a travel film can be productive for intermediate to advanced students. Feature films require special attention but can lead to more sophisticated projects. A list of videocassette sources is appended. (MSE)

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The Videocassette Challenge:

Strategies for the Foreign Language Teacher

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Making the Case for Videocassettes

Today American spend almost as much time watching television as they do working at their jobs. Are viewers influenced by what they see while watching hour after hour? Manufacturers seem to feel that television can have a profound impact on behavior. After all, they spend billions of dollars per year on commercials intended to convince viewers to buy their products. Politicians are also impressed with television's potential. Each election year they pour millions into political ads that depict their candidates as saints and their opponents as sinners.

Television obviously has immense appeal for students. Can instructors tap video's potential for the classroom and turn this instrument of entertainment into an instrument of education? How can video programming be used to facilitate students' efforts to learn a foreign language? If videos are to make a significant contribution to classroom teaching, they must offer advantages not easily achieved through regular teaching techniques and other media.

Special Qualities of Foreign Language Videos

Robert Ariew points to some of the advantages of video. Unlike slides it provides motion and illustrates scenes, actions and processes (Ariew, p. 47). Also, unlike films it is almost noise free and very flexible. It can be paused, advanced, reversed and even removed from the machine at exactly

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the frame where the instructor wants to continue the next lesson. It is also less expensive than film and more easily available than videodisc.

Frequently one hears that students face some difficulty when they leave language classes and study under a different teacher or travel to a foreign country to practice what they have learned in the classroom. Students report trouble making adjustments as they listen to new accents, different speaking styles, or the idioms of a particular region. They are accustomed to the language of their classroom teachers, and the language of other speakers at first hearing may sound no more understandable to them than one they have never heard. Adjustment to new intonation and rhythm patterns comes painfully. The learning experience can develop much more effectively, however, if students hear different styles and accents in videotaped programs.

Exposure to a variety of voices prepares students for the real world of language diversity and helps them to understand everyday speech. Obviously, an overabundance of exposure to informal styles can prove confusing in the early years of study, but if students receive at least moderate amount of exposure, they will find themselves better prepared to face the world beyond the classroom. Also, when students watch actors encounter each other in a dramatic setting, they hear language spoken at a normal pace, rather than the slower, well-articulated classroom pronunciation. In short, video programs prepare students to understand situations involving rapid, animated, and sometimes even slurred conversation. They enable students to understand a variety of people whose voices reflect a myriad of class, ethnic, and regional backgrounds. As Pierre J. Capretz, French professor at Yale University, notes, the language of the video is idiomatic and natural (Hosley, p. 3).

Furthermore, watching real-life situations and conversations on videotape helps take students beyond formal textbook exercises. Capretz says, "Television enables us to bring France right into the student's living room. It offers us the chance to give students direct contact with the French people, just as if they had traveled there. Yet we are able to structure the contact so that it becomes a language lesson" (p. 3).

Producers of videotapes show considerable savvy about the tastes of today's generation, and they often present their material in a soap opera format. The language suddenly appears much more interesting and relevant as students listen in the context of budding romance, broken love, conspiracy, hopes, dreams, ambition, and disappointment. For a generation that grew up with *As the World Turns*, videotapes make compelling entertainment. They educate without reminding the students constantly that they are participating in the learning process.

Using Video in the Classroom

There are a variety of ways one can employ video materials in the classroom. There are no airtight solutions, no techniques applicable to all situations. The instructor will want to experiment with individual groups of students and select the approaches that work best. What are some of the familiar problems, and possible solutions?

One difficulty is related to the length of feature films which often run for 90 to 120 minutes, a stretch that does not work well for the typical class period of 50 or 75 minutes. Through experimentation, one discovers that it is not necessary to show an entire film at one time. To ensure that there is adequate time and opportunity to discuss both language and message, a viewing of a 15-minute segment often works well. Sometimes one can proceed with the rest of the film in serial form, showing additional 15-minute excerpts once or twice a week until the entire story has been examined. This "serial" approach works marvelously in the showing of Argentina's gripping drama, *La historia oficial* (Almi Pictures). Students are motivated to see the ensuing portions of the story in order to learn what happens to the leading characters.

The use of a single 15-minute segment also works effectively without follow-on. Students do not need to witness the entire drama to gain something of value from it. The important task for the instructor is to preview the film and select that portion which particularly rivets attention, shows important examples of language usage, and stimulates discussion. Then it can be taken into the classroom with specific activities and objectives in mind.

Another problem is that students often have difficulty understanding the story and the language at the same time. They miss much when they must simultaneously make sense of the characters' backgrounds, follow the thread of the story, and interpret the language. Efforts to understand what is occurring in the drama can become a strenuous and frustrating exercise if students lack a good introduction to the subject of study. In advance of class presentation of a dramatic film, the instructor should provide a brief written description of the principal characters as well as a short "treatment" or outline of the plot. If the film segment contains slang or idioms, it is worthwhile to introduce them to the students in the preview period. The students can then watch the program with particular satisfaction as they come to understand the slang in the context of the story. It is also useful to provide students with a brief list of questions to be discussed following viewing of the video. This prepares them for the kind of analysis that will be expected of them and

helps to give them direction. It ensures that their viewing experience will be active, not passive.

Classroom work with video suggests one important conclusion about the instructor's role. The instructor must do considerable preparatory work to make media-based education a success. Attempts to introduce a little video material just to make classroom work more interesting will produce little gain. Video instruction works effectively only when the teacher does essential groundwork, carefully previewing the tapes and preparing material to help students focus on what is important and new.

Selecting Materials

The proper selection of video equipment and materials is crucial to incorporating video successfully into the classroom. There are many types of commercially available videocassettes and the variety is growing rapidly. One sees a constantly expanding market, an increasing number of dealers, and ever-larger catalogues.

Very little equipment is needed for a basic video program: one videocassette player or recorder connected to one television monitor. The VCR features should include "shuttle search" and "freeze frame/pause." Both allow the picture to remain on the screen when they are activated; the first is useful for replaying short segments, the second for stopping to discuss a still frame. A color video projector is an added plus for wide-screen viewing in large classrooms and auditoriums.

Choosing Videocassettes

In the selection of videocassettes, the following items should be considered when making orders for rental or purchase:

1. *Categories of videocassettes and subject matter.* The choice of subject matter should be determined by the teacher's purpose or goal in using videocassettes and by the students' level of experience. Most available materials will fall into one or more of the following categories: travel, history, art, sociology, anthropology, literature and literary materials (plays, dramatizations of novels, poetry readings, biographies of authors), musical presentations, feature-length films, silent films, animated

cartoons, television commercials and programs, "soap operas" and dramatic serials, specialty videos (cooking demonstrations, exercise and physical fitness instruction), tapes made to supplement textbooks, and tapes made strictly for language instruction (the Berlitz series, the Language Plus Survival Course, the BBC Foreign Language Series). This wide variety of materials provides for a good range of levels of difficulty and gives the teacher the opportunity to choose the materials that are most appropriate for the students' proficiency level and the teacher's goal for a given activity.

2. *Video sizes and formats.* Most materials are available on VHS and Beta. The low cost of the VHS ½" tape makes it the most popular.
3. *Languages used and subtitles.* Materials are available recorded in English only, foreign language only, and foreign language with English subtitles. In addition, many feature-length films originally produced in English are available dubbed in foreign languages. The use of the last group cannot be recommended; the lack of coordination of sounds, lip movements, and facial expressions can be very confusing. Some videocassette dealers make special offers for videocassettes purchased with both English and foreign language sound tracks.
4. *Length.* This varies from a few minutes for television commercials to two to three hours for a feature-length film or several hours for a complete dramatic serial or instructional series. Segments of a videocassette as short as one minute can be used effectively.
5. *Cost.* The cost may range from $39.00 or less for a single videocassette to as much as $4,000.00 for a complete series. The low cost of videocassettes is one factor that makes them so appealing for classroom use. (To give an example: a 16mm film from Films for the Humanities which lists for $975.00 can be purchased for $199.00 on videocassette.)
6. *Date or original filming.* The date is very important if the instructor is looking for contemporary materials. Many older films are being reissued as videocassettes and slide series and filmstrips are also being converted to videocassette format.

7. *Color versus black and white.* While most new materials are in color, and color is normally more interesting and useful, classic films produced in black and white should not be overlooked or rejected simply because they lack color.
8. *Ratings of feature-length films.* Ratings are often not available. The teacher must preview and make his or her own rating or judgment as to the appropriateness of the material for the age group and teaching situation, especially when dealing with foreign-made films.
9. *Preview, purchase, and rental policies.* Many dealers will send videocassettes for "preview with intent to purchase." It is usually easier to use this procedure through the school library or purchasing department rather than as an individual instructor. Some dealers lease or offer memberships in rental clubs. However, it is probably best to purchase, considering the time and effort expended in making supplementary materials to use with videocassettes. After developing exercises and activities for a particular videocassette, the teacher will want to have that videocassette available for future use.
10. *Teaching aids.* Some videocassettes come with free-of-charge teachers' guides or with student booklets which may be purchased separately. These written aids include vocabulary lists, pre- and post-viewing exercises and activities, scripts, and synopses.

Keeping these ten considerations in mind, the teacher must become familiar with the catalogues of a number of dealers (see Appendix). With the rapid growth of the industry, new videocassettes and ancillaries are appearing monthly. Teachers accepting the challenge of videocassettes will want to have their names added to all mailing lists possible and will need to watch for new companies entering the market.

Using Videocassettes Effectively

The use of videotape as a motivational and supplementary activity to what students often view as routine classroom work requires much planning and preparation. Many decisions have to be made far in advance of the

introduction of the tape into the classroom. The instructor must decide what specific purpose a given tape is to serve. For example, a videotape may be particularly appropriate for study of a variety of grammatical points (e.g., object pronouns, command forms, past tenses, etc.), vocabulary building, theme writing, conversational activities, and cultural enrichment.

The first step toward use of a videotape will be to view it, perhaps several times, taking note of possible classroom uses and then deciding at what point in the particular course the video or segments of it can best be introduced. If the tape has an accompanying teacher's guide or activity booklet, then much of the preparatory work may already be done. If not, the instructor will need to devise activities, including vocabulary lists and work sheets. Preparation may include, at least for brief segments, a "script" of the segment for use as a reference. For longer videotapes, notes taken during the previewing can serve as a later guide. Writing the script or taking notes gives most of the material needed for compiling vocabulary lists and also makes apparent the grammatical structures used in the videotape.

Watching visual images carefully is essential for identifying unspoken vocabulary items necessary for describing the content of the video. For instance, the action of a particular segment of a Spanish film may occur at the side of a lake with boats, fishermen, and mountains in the background while the words *lago*, *barco*, *pescador*, and *montaña* are never spoken. The instructor will wish to supply such terms in order to aid the students in expressing their own thoughts about the film.

Once the specific use to be made of the videotape has been decided, it is time to prepare for its presentation in the classroom. Classroom use should be carefully structured and lead toward the accomplishment of feasible and well-defined goals. A structure that works exceedingly well for most kinds of videotapes and can be easily modified for others is a plan of three stages adapted from Goldberg's *Video Guide to Accompany Videocassettes from Radio Televisión Española* (pp. vii–viii). A similar method, though less obviously stated, is also discernible in Lonergan's comprehensive *Video in the Language Classroom*. The three stages are: (1) introduction, (2) comprehension check, and (3) follow-up.

In the introductory stage the instructor lays the groundwork for deriving maximum benefit from the videotape—introduction of vocabulary and review of grammatical structures to be emphasized. Vocabulary lists and grammatical review are presented in one class meeting in anticipation of viewing the tape in the following one, or the lists are distributed and review is assigned as homework. Vocabulary lists should be kept to a minimum and include only obviously essential items. Focusing on just two or three grammatical structures at a time keeps the material from becoming unwieldy and

does not overwhelm the students. Necessary cultural information is also presented during the introductory stage to provide appropriate background for the tape.

When this preparation has been completed, a "preview" is given to the class introducing only short selected portions of a segment to reinforce key vocabulary and grammatical structures. The instructor must decide in advance which parts of the videotape are most appropriate. The preview serves to make the students more comfortable with the videotape; they see important characters and hear the language spoken. This also whets their curiosity much as the previews of coming attractions do at the movie theater. After the in-class preview, materials to be used in the second stage are distributed and examined so that students will know to look and listen for certain items.

During stage two, the comprehension check, the segment is shown from beginning to end, with pauses at intervals. At these intervals comprehension is measured by means of the previously planned activities. This check should be viewed not as a test but as a guide to the students' understanding of the recorded material. Comprehension activities may include questions to be answered regarding content and statements to be marked *true* or *false* (*cierto-falso*, *vrai-faux*, *richtig-falsch*, etc.). If the goal is vocabulary acquisition and reinforcement, word lists are prepared and students are asked to check items mentioned and/or seen on the videotape. These lists should be limited to material pertinent to the understanding of the videotape. The advantage of teacher-made lists is that students can simply mark items without having their attention diverted from the videotape. This is a form of note taking described by Lonergan (pp.20–29) which can be abandoned in favor of true note taking as the students' ability in the language increases. A second advantage is that students have the words written correctly before them. They are not encouraged to reinforce misspellings of the vocabulary items.

The comprehension check affords an excellent opportunity for oral work in the language. At each section pause, students respond to comprehension questions based on content and are encouraged to use the grammatical structures being emphasized. Students may also be asked to summarize the content of the section viewed and to express their reactions to it, or they can make brief notes at section pauses and summarize everything at the end of a segment.

During the comprehension check, the various functions available on the videocassette player are particularly valuable; they offer this medium a distinct advantage over the use of film projector and screen. The rewind feature allows for quick repetition of a section for clarification or reinforce-

ment. Another possibility is to replay a section with the volume turned down while students comment on or describe the characters and action. If the VCR is equipped with a "freeze frame/pause" feature, the action can be frozen for discussion of the still picture. Depending on the length of the segment, the comprehension check may be extended over several class periods until the instructor is satisfied that students understand the segment and have achieved appropriate mastery of the grammatical constructions.

During the third stage, the follow-up, the entire videotape or lengthy segment is viewed without interruption and activities of a more creative type are introduced following the viewing. For example, if the students have seen a video set in a provincial town, they can comment on or write a short description of life in that town and the life-style of the characters portrayed. If they are familiar through previous study or experience with life in Paris, Frankfurt, or Mexico City, they might compare life in the small town and the large city. One of the exciting aspects of the follow-up stage is that students will be struck by certain things not noticed by the instructor. Thus, students themselves participate in the selection of themes for follow-up activities.

Using Commercials

Versatile tapes for use at the elementary level are those containing collections of television commercials. Commercials are short and can be shown in their entirety in a matter of minutes and they are designed to be viewed again and again. Also, they generally have catchy tunes or phrases which quickly become embedded in the students' minds. The following plan shows what can be done with three Spanish commercials from Teacher's Discovery's *Comerciales en español* (Trix, McDonald's, Capri-Sun):

> Purposes of activity: to build vocabulary, to demonstrate uses of *para*, *hay*, and verbs like *gustar*; to heighten awareness of Hispanic presence in the United States.
>
> A. Introduction
> 1. Play the commercials in their entirety.
> 2. Distribute materials for vocabulary and language focus.
> a. Review vocabulary.
> b. Review uses of *para*, *hay*, and verbs like *gustar*.
> 3. Tell students what to listen for:
> a. "Trix es para niños, no para conejos."

b. "No hay más papitas."
c. "A los niños les encanta y también a su mamá."

4. Have students invent new sentences using *para*, *hay*, *encantar*.

B. Comprehension check
1. Play each commercial separately, repeating it or sections of it as needed.
2. Complete comprehension activities:
a. Word lists (foods)
b. Informational questions
c. Multiple choice or true-false exercises
d. Oral summary

C. Follow-up
1. Play all three commercials without interruption.
2. Activities:
a. Have students tell differences in these commercials and the ones they are accustomed to seeing and hearing in English.
b. Have students explain why these commercials are shown on television in the United States and mention places where they would likely be seen.

Dubbing a Travel Film

A productive activity for intermediate to advanced students is dubbing (having the students supply their own foreign-language commentary or narration for a tape with English sound track). In this activity, the students read their compositions aloud to the class while the video is shown with the volume turned down. Or they record it outside of class on a tape recorder and then play it in class while the video runs silently (Lonergan, pp. 77–79).

Travel films made to attract American tourists to the various foreign countries are an ideal choice for the dubbing activity. While there may be a tendency in these films to show only the attractive and "quaint" features of the particular country and to overemphasize those with which the American tourist can identify, they are nevertheless of professional quality and have excellent photography. They are also bound to include (even if in visual images only) important historical, architectural, and cultural information which can be of benefit to students. For this activity, the basic plan outlined above must be varied. The comprehension check as such is no longer needed since the original commentary is in English; then the three stages become: (1) introduction, (2) writing activity and (3) follow-up.

Using Feature Films

Full-length feature movies require special attention. Feature movies are best used with advanced classes. If they come with English subtitles, these may be masked with a strip of paper taped to the bottom of the screen so that students are forced to concentrate on the spoken language. During a subsequent repetition of a section the students can listen and look at the subtitles for mistranslations or omissions. For classroom use the feature movie must be broken into segments that can be treated in class according to the three-stage plan. If the film is to be viewed in its entirety, it must be presented in serial form much like a soap opera.

Students are accustomed to the soap opera format and will have no objection to this type of presentation. As the movie progresses, each new section may be preceded by a summary of the previous day's action, presented in the target language either by the teacher or by a student assigned the task for the day. Another approach, especially good for college classes in which time is limited, is to assign viewing of the movie outside of class (in the library or language lab) to be followed by in-class viewing and discussion of selected scenes.

Some feature movies lead the class to develop more sophisticated projects such as investigation or study of a particular historical period, a social problem, or customs. The movie may be viewed as a work of art and discussion of film techniques can take place—symbolism, flash-back, setting, characterization, motivation, etc. An example of a film that lends itself well to investigatory projects is the aforementioned and widely available *La historia oficial*. For this film, students can be assigned projects based on the tragedy of the *desaparecidos* or on more general topics like the history of Argentina, the cultural diversity of the country, etc. Because other events such as the Malvinas crisis are mentioned in the film, the problems and situations represented by such events may be researched and discussed as a follow-up activity.

Meeting the Challenge

The videocassette challenge can be met successfully and enjoyably by teachers and students and financial investment does not have to be great. After a small initial investment a videocassette collection can be enlarged year by year. However, the instructor must make a commitment to invest a substantial amount of time and energy in the preparation of well-organized exercises and activities for the incorporation of video into the total classroom experience. The three-stage presentation plan discussed above provides a

simple but flexible basis for the development of supplementary materials. The yield from the investment of money, time, and energy is apparent in the positive reactions and improved language skills of the students.

Appendix

Selected Videocassette Sources

CONSULATE GENERAL OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC of GERMANY
1000 Peachtree Center Cain Tower
229 Peachtree Street, N.E. Telephone: (404) 659-4760
Atlanta, Georgia 30043-3201

CROSSROADS VIDEO
15 Buckminster Lane Telephone: (516) 365-3715
Manhasset, New York 11030

FACETS MULTIMEDIA
1517 W. Fullerton Avenue Telephone: (312) 281-9075
Chicago, Illinois 60614

FILMS FOR THE HUMANITIES
P. O. Box 2053 Telephone: (800) 257-5126
Princeton, New Jersey 08543

FILMS INCORPORATED
5547 North Ravenswood Avenue Telephone: (800) 323-4222
Chicago, Illinois 60640 Illinois: (312) 878-2600

FOLK DANCE VIDEOS INTERNATIONAL
10100 Park Cedar Dr., Suite 110 Telephone: (704) 542-9404
Charlotte, North Carolina 28210

GOETHE INSTITUTE ATLANTA
German Cultural Center Telephone: (404) 892-2388
400 Colony Square
Atlanta, Georgia 30361-2401

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN/College Division
13400 Midway Road Telephone: (800) 588-8398
Dallas, Texas 75244-5165 (214) 980-1100

HOUSE OF TYROL
P. O. Box 909 Gateway Plaza Telephone: (404) 865-5115
Cleveland, Georgia 30528 (800) 443-1299

INICIATIVAS CULTURALES DE ESPAÑA, S.A.
Apartado de Correos 14.655
28080 Madrid
España/Spain

INTERNATIONAL FILM BUREAU, INC.
332 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60604-4382
Telephone: (312) 427-4545

INTERNATIONAL VIDEO NETWORK
2242 Camino Ramon
San Ramon, California 94583
Telephone: (415) 866-1121
(800) 443-0100
Ext. 561
Telex: 470242-PIER-UI

JEM COMMUNICATIONS, INC.
3619 Kennedy Road
P. O. Box 708
South Plainfield, New Jersey 07080
Telephone: (800) 338-4814

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART OF LATIN AMERICA
Organization of American States
1889 "F" St. N.W.
Wasington, D. C. 20006
Telephone: (202) 789-6021

NORTHEAST CONFERENCE MEDIA
P. O. Box 623
Middlebury, Vermont 05753
Telephone: (802) 388-4017

THE ROLAND COLLECTION
3120 Pawtucket Road
Northbrook, Illinois 60062
Telephone: (312) 291-2230

TAMARELLE'S INTERNATIONAL FILMS
110 Cohasset Stage Road
Chico, California 95926
Telephone: (916) 895-3429
(800) 356-3577

TEACHER'S DISCOVERY
1130 E. Big Beaver
Troy, Michigan 48033-1997
Telephone: (800) 521-3897
Michigan: (313) 689-9458

VID-DIMENSION, INC.
4221 W. Sierra Madre, Ste. 109
Fresno, California 93722
Telephone: (800) 233-0089
California: (800) 336-1005
or: (209) 276-6000

WIBLE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE, INC.
24 South 8th Street
P. O. Box 870
Allentown, Pennsylvania 18105

WORLD VIDEO
P. O. Box 30469 Telephone: (615) 691-9827
Knoxville, Tennessee 37930-0469

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